

Emphasis on man's superiority as against his supremacy

(Transcribed from Prof. Oliver's Lecture)

According to Buddhism, man (woman) is one of **the living beings** (*sutta*, *pāṇa* and *bhūta*). According to the Sanskrit texts, animals and human beings **are equal** in relation with four things: food, sleep, fear and sexual desire. Scientists have identified three qualities to man and woman: identity, stimulation and security. In the *jātaka* stories¹ men's supremacy is denied. Animals are also taking part of human character: they talk, they practice morality, and they follow the leadership. Therefore, it is said that *jātaka* stories were taught by the Buddha to the people as a lesson that they should live in harmony with the other living beings such as animals, plants and environment. In this sense, Buddhism is not concerned about only human beings but other beings, whether it is organic or inorganic in the entire environment.

But, still, Buddhism maintains that **man is superior to other beings** in some aspects. Before going to examine them, I'd like to make the primary remark: in the discourses there are statements which indicate the superiority of man:

- (1) **attāhi attano nātho** (man's security is himself, no one else)
- (2) **dullabhan ca manussattam** (it is very rare to become human being)
- (3) **kiccho manussapaṭilābho** (to become human being, one must try very hard)

In the statements like this, the superiority over others is given to man. As I might say earlier, there are life comes into its existence in five forms. In the **Dhanajānī Sutta** (MN), the Buddha gives the list of these **five forms of life**: hell (*nirayika*), animal (*tiracchāna*), ghost (*pettivisaya*), human being (*manussa*), and gods (*deva*). The Sutta says that the later is superior to the former in this category. The highest form, therefore, is deva. The second highest form is human being. But still **human being is superior to deva in various aspects**. Deva has two forms: deva and brahma.

In the **Sangārava Sutta** (MN), a Brahmin asks the Buddha whether there is form of life which is superior to human being in the universe. The Buddha does not give the answer categorically, saying "the existence of devas are so obvious that I should not give you a clear answer of Yes or No." The Buddha was very careful to make categorical answer to such question even though he clearly recognize that there are devas.

Only the human being can develop the **knowledge** to see that the life is available in the form of deva. One who has this **extrasensory perception** can see various things that the ordinary people cannot see. One can see with this knowledge the superior being, deva.

¹ There are **jātaka stanza** and **jātaka stories**. While the former is founded in Pāli canon itself, the later is given in the commentaries. The stanza, however, cannot be understood without the supporting stories. Therefore, the scholars came into the conclusion that the stories were also existed in the time of the stanza; they are composed during the time of the Buddha, not added later. (Oliever's opinion).

The term **the world (*loka*)**, in Buddhism, has two obvious meanings: the human being² and the universe. Regarding the world as universe, there were four questions that were repeatedly raised in the Indian religious thoughts: whether the world is final; whether the world is non-final; whether eternal; or not-eternal. These are the first four parts of the 10 unanswered questions by the Buddha: he said these are the meaningless questions which cannot lead man to his liberation. But the later period, in the commentary texts, these questions are taken answer as non-final. In the discourses the Buddha says that the beginning of the world would not be known. In the Mahayana texts saying that we don't know either the first beginning or the end of the world.

Although the Buddha did not answer to the questions of the world, in the discourse, he gave a thorough knowledge of the nature and extension of the world. According to ***Lokadhātu Sutta*** (AN), there are **three units of the world**:

- (1) ***Cūlanikā lokadhātu***: the minor worlds system which has thousands of suns and moons within.
- (2) ***Majjhimikā lokadhātu***: the middle worlds system which has thousands of minor worlds system within.
- (3) ***Mahā lokadhātu***: the great worlds system which has thousands of medium worlds system within.

The Buddha says that in our solar system there are four places where the human beings live. They are **four great continents**: *jainboduīpa*, *aparagoyāna*, *pubha videha*, and *uttarakuru*. These four continents are found in our solar system of the first world (*cūlanikā lokadhātu*). In other words, there are thousands of these four continents in the first worlds system. Then we can imagine that how many more worlds of human beings are there in the second and third worlds system. Therefore, man should not proudly think that we are only man in the world. By understanding his position, man must realize how small he is in compare with the entire universe.

There are **five principles (*five niyāmas*)** which is operating the entire universe of man and environment:

- (1) ***utu niyāma***: physical law
- (2) ***bija niyāma***: biological law
- (3) ***citta niyāma***: psychological law
- (4) ***kamma niyāma***: moral law
- (5) ***dhamma niyāma***: dhamma law³

² The Buddha says, "Monks, within this fathom-long body with perception and mind, I declare the world, origin of the world, cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world." (S. I. p. 62).

³ Even in the Pāli canon itself, there is discrepancy about the meaning of dhamma. There are various phenomena which come under the fifth category of the law: for example, in the ***Acchariya-abbhūta Sutta*** (MN), the list of **marvelous things** happened when the bodhisatta was conceived in his mother's womb. These unnatural phenomena belong to the **dhamma law**.

All these five laws are operating under the principle of the dependent co-arising (*paticcasamuppāda*) that means each law is related to each other and to various other factors. Out of those five laws, the third (*citta niyāma*) and fourth (*kamma niyāma*) are directly related to the human being, that is, almost half of them is related to the human being. Therefore, a bigger statement of Buddhism is assigned to moral behavior of man and his mentality. Even the entire Buddhism is given to man: the entire Buddhism is the science of man; taking any part of teachings of Buddhism, it always concerns man. **Buddhism focuses on man.** This is clear in the basic teachings of the Buddha such as the four noble truths, the dependent co-arising (*paticcasamuppāda*), and the 12 links of *paticcasamuppāda*: they are focusing on salvation of the human being, nothing related to other beings. This is one side.

On the other side, there are various teachings in which man (man's nature) is analyzed. In Buddhism there are five teachings in which man is comprehensively analyzed:

- (1) Analysis of name and form (*nāma rūpa*)
- (2) Analysis of five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*)
- (3) Analysis of six elements (*chadhātu*)
- (4) Analysis of twelve faculties (*dvādasa-āyatana*)
- (5) Analysis of eighteen elements (*aṭṭhārasa-dhātu-vibhaga*)

Among these categories, only in the third one, the outside world is considered, that is environment of man; but it is still related to man. It is interesting to note that the second one suggests that the first is incomplete, and the third one suggests that the second one is incomplete, so on. **In early Buddhism, therefore, man is analyzed into 18 elements as the final analysis.** For example, the five aggregates are given to analyze *nāma* into four aggregates: *vedanā* (feeling, sensation), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (mental and physical construction), and *viññāna* (consciousness) while *rūpa* (material form) is remain as it is. But it is for the third analysis of six elements (dhātu): *paṭhavī* (earth), *āpo* (water), *tejo* (fire), *vāyo* (wind), *ākāsa* (space) and *viññāna* (consciousness). In the analysis of 18 elements, *viññāna* becomes six-fold: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness. This is the whole picture of man understood by the early Buddhist scriptures.

In the later Buddhism, however, the further analysis of man took place by writing Abhidhamma. This analysis of human being in **Abhidhamma** is called *paramattha dhamma* (absolute phenomena) in the sense of that no more analysis is possible. There are **four paramattha dhamma of human being** in Abhidhamma: mind (*citta*), matter (*rūpa*), mental concomitance (*cetasika*), and the final emancipation of man (*nibbāna*). It is mentioned that the 52 mental concomitances give the various combinations of human mind.

The difference between this later Abhidhamma and the early Buddhism regarding man is that in the later Abhidhamma the existence of individuals is negated while in the early Buddhist texts the presence of individuals is never negated by the Buddha. According to the **later Abhidhamma** texts,

there are **no individual** men and women; but **only the absolute phenomena (*paramattha dhamma*)** of man exist.

This notion of the later Abhidhamma, however, could not be accepted by the Abhidhamma of the Pāli canon itself. There is no such term as *paramattha dhamma* in the early Buddhist texts. Out of the seven texts of the Abhidhamma canon, ***Puggala paññatti*** is the smallest text. As the name itself indicates, it analyze (*paññatti*) the various categories of individuals (*puggala*): 386 individuals are counted and 142 categories of individuals are mentioned. Therefore, even in this **early Abhidhamma** text, the **presence of individual** persons are accepted and analyzed. If there is no individual, the historical existence of the Buddha could also be negated. Actually the entire Tripiṭaka, in the subject matter, is nothing else than about man.

In the Pāli commentary the term for man is ***manussa*** which has two definitions: one is that man is called so because **the first man's name** was *manussa*. Human beings are descendant of *manussa*; the other definition is that man is called so because he/she **develops mind**. The first definition is obviously non-Buddhistic origin. The second is the Buddhist's one because it is taught by the Buddha that there are thousands of species of beings and among them man is the one who develops mind. Unlike other theistic religious teachings, in the Buddhist teachings, man is not created by God but just evolved throughout the millions of years. While there is no possibility of man's free will logically in the theistic religion, Buddhism assures the man's free will because it does not accept the theory of creation which suppose the creator God as the first cause of existence of all beings.

Ven. Rahula says, in his book 'What the Buddha Taught,' that there is no free will in Buddhism because everything is conditioned. This is absolutely wrong.⁴ The human free will is the one of the characteristic in the teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. For example, the teaching of kamma, one of the sub-teachings of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, considers of three theories: (1) ***kammavāda***; (2) ***kiriyaavāda***; (3) ***viriyavāda***. The first one suggests that the morality exists; the second suggests that the moral deeds create results; and the third indicates that the individual is free to select what he thinks, says, and acts. So the teaching of kamma in Buddhism assures the free will of man. Unlike Buddhism, Hinduism accepts only first two theories not the third.

According to one discourse in SN, one Brahmin came to the Buddha and said, "There is no free will." The Buddha answered to him, "Young man, you came here on your own; you are arguing on your own; how can you say that there is no free will?" There is a list of terms indicating free will: ***attakāra***, ***purisakāra*** (man has will to do), ***purisathāma*** (man has the strength), ***ārambhadhātu*** (man has the initiation), ***nikkamadhātu*** (man has not only initiation but also going forward), ***thitidhātu*** (man can

⁴ Ven. Rahula does not negate the human free will but so called the 'absolute free will' which is basically connected with the idea of God and soul. What Oliver is arguing here is not different from what Rahula emphasizes in his book. Unlike Oliver, however, Rahula seems to know that the Free Will theory is the basic matter of Christian doctrine and of the Western philosophy. See Walpola Rahula, *What The Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974) 54-55.

establish on his own), **thāmadhātu** (man has the power). Buddhism says that if man does not have free will, the responsibility collapses; then the human society becomes uncivilized.

The Buddha says, "I am not save any one; it is up to you who to save yourself." There is no one who saves us in Buddhism unlike other theistic religion.

Regarding our topic of **man's superiority**, we can point out two things in the early Buddhist texts: (1) Human being can produce the **two greatest men** in the history; **the Buddha** and **the universal king** (raja-cakkavattin). Neither deva nor brahma can become the Buddha or the universal king; (2) Human being only can become **sekha** (a noble learner) or **stāpanna** (the stream winner) who entered the path towards the arahatship. The deva or other beings cannot become sekha. That is the reason why the bodhisatta became man not deva in order to become the Buddha. Therefore, in spiritual part, man is much better than deva or brahma.